

## A WORD ABOUT TURKISH WOMEN.

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THE Turk is little known in America, and perhaps least of all is the Turkish woman understood. I have lived for nine years in Constantinople and have learned to love both Turkey and its women. I have grieved with them over the dark days that are past, and have rejoiced with them in the wonderful transformation that July 1908 made in their land, and I hope with them for the happy future of Turkey. And for none do I desire this future more than for its women to whom a free government brings a chance for growth and more abundant life.

Would that I could give an adequate picture of my Turkish friends; that I could convey the charm of their simple, gentle natures, their gracious and graceful manners, their low, warbling voices, and their lovely expressive faces; that I might waft over the seas the aroma of beautiful Turkish personality.

What are Turkish women like and what are their possibilities?

They are often not strong physically. They have known too little how to live, and careless and slothful habits have told on their strength. Nevertheless I see no reason why they should not, with proper training in exercise and knowledge of their own bodies become a vigorous people.

Dr. Nazim Bey, a remarkable Turkish patriot, a man who after receiving a fine general and medical education in Paris, assumed the disguise of a *hodja* or dervish and went all over Asia Minor arousing in people a hatred for the despotism of Abdul Hamid and a desire for freedom, and who was one of the organizers of the recent revolution in Turkey, has interesting views on the Turkish people. He told me that as a physician he had noticed that the mixed races were the strongest physically and intellectually, and that he based his ardent hope for the future of the Turks partly on their being a young race and uninjured by the use of alcohol and

absinthe. He said that the Turks had as yet given nothing to the world, that their native intelligence had been stifled by despotism, but that the time was soon coming when they would contribute to the world's knowledge and ideals. His ideas seemed reasonable and his fervor was contagious. "Mark my words," he said eagerly, "the world will hear from the intelligence of the Turks ere you and I are dead."

Others, Armenians and Europeans, agree with Dr. Nazim Bey on the native and undebauched intelligence of the Turkish peasant, and I see no reason why both men and women, once free to develop, should not form a fine race physically and intellectually. Women have not been regarded by the Turks as intellectually promising, as is shown by their proverb, "Woman's hair is long but her wit is short." But they are coming to take their place beside the men in intellectual work, as their success in writing, studying, and teaching amply demonstrates.

What occupations are normally open to a Turkish woman?

A Turkish *hanum*<sup>1</sup> almost always marries, in which case, unless she be poor, she sits at ease and is tended by her servants, not even darning her husband's stockings. Of course if she be poor all the household drudgery falls on her. Nevertheless there are some single women, widows or unmarried girls or a very few who do not marry at all, who need to work. What can they do?

They may become servants, but only in Moslem households; a Moslem would not work in a Christian house. They may sell sweets or fruit or *semit*s in the woman's cabin or waiting room of the steamers, but they can never serve in shops for the general public. They may wait on women in the baths, and give massage or assist in the toilet.

There are no Turkish trained nurses, although there are some women who do a rough sort of nursing. After the granting of the constitution some women petitioned through the papers to be allowed to study nursing, and the best surgeon in Constantinople said he would admit a few women into his hospital for training, but the counter-revolution of April put a stop to all such movements for a time.

Another set of women petitioned Hamdi Bey, the curator of the Art Museum, to admit them into the so-called School of Fine Arts; he replied that it was impossible, as men were studying there and the accommodations were too slight to admit of women having

<sup>1</sup> A common noun meaning "lady"; used also as a title corresponding to "Miss" or "Mrs."

separate rooms, but that he would arrange later for Turkish women to study drawing and painting.

Gypsy women tell fortunes and dance for money, but no decent Turkish woman would do this. I suppose some could sew for a livelihood, but all the ladies of my acquaintance get their clothes made by Greek or French dressmakers. Cooks, bath maids, laundry maids, wet nurses, coffee servers, secretaries, readers of the Koran, are found among Turkish women. Old women hawk articles of dress, jewelry, embroideries and cosmetics from harem to harem, and carry local gossip, as do the New England sewing women. In the royal palace the female officials include the Lady of the Treasury, the Private Secretary, the Keeper of the Seal, the Mistress of Robes, the Lady Water-pourer, the Lady Coffee-server, the Lady Pipe-keeper, the Mistress of the Sherbets, the Lady Wet-nurse and Lady Chaplain, and other ladies in waiting.

The best occupation for Turkish women is teaching. The Dar-ul-Malumet school turns out a good many teachers in a year who give private lessons, become governesses, or teach in the schools exclusively for girls. Of course, the schools being few, this is not a large field. Women also become matrons of schools and orphanages. I call to mind a sweet-faced elderly lady who is principal or matron of the Industrial School for Girls, and who, they say, is like a mother to the orphan pupils in her charge.

Doing embroidery and making rugs are trades by which a girl may make a meager living, and earn a little dowry for her settlement in life. There practically exist no mills or factories in Turkey. Professional match-making, buying and training girls for the rich harems, and guarding the members of the imperial seraglio, are all occupations along the line of housekeeping. A profession that is coming to the fore since the revolution is that of a writer, this being one which a married woman can best follow, and which will increase in importance with the years. Partly because there are so few trades for women, a very large number are driven to the lucrative employment of begging.

The moral character of Turkish hanums shows the same lack of training that marks their physical and intellectual nature, but also shows great possibilities. A Turkish wife and mother is very loving and devoted, although seldom intelligently so. She has been sharply trained to modesty, but not at all to self-control, and will cry aloud or scream, and let herself go on in a way that shocks our western ideas. She is naturally intensely loyal, and this quality easily develops into patriotism. She has a great deal of natural

pride; in Turkey, even among the women, one never forgets that the Turks are the dominant race. In a mixed school the Turks and the English girls affiliate naturally, while the subject races form other groups.

A sense of truth has not been developed among Turkish women, for truth demands intelligence, and that the average Turkish woman has not possessed. That they can learn to regard truth very strictly is proved by my own experience with the absolute trustworthiness of Turkish women who have received an education.

In America the Turks have been judged, naturally but most unfortunately, by the cruel and tyrannical actions of their late sultan, Abdul Hamid II, and often also by the excesses of Kurds and Bashi bazooks, who, while they are Ottoman subjects, are not Turks at all. The world nevertheless has been forced to regard with surprise and admiration that wonderful bloodless revolution of July 1908, by which they threw off the shackles of a blighting despotism and in which they displayed not only heroism and power of organization, but such moderation and magnanimity as make the revolution one of the greatest national achievements. Again, when the treacherous sultan and his minions organized a counter-revolution in April 1909, and bathed Cilicia in innocent blood, and imperiled the newly-won liberty of Turkey, the Young Turks were prompt, decisive, and able in putting down both uprising and sultan, and still showed themselves untouched by rancor, a spirit of revenge or bloodthirstiness.

The splendid qualities of the Young Turks displayed in these cases as well as in the period of suspense before the outbreak in July, are also possessed by the women of Turkey. They too have shown heroism, self-sacrifice, love of liberty and of humanity, intelligence in service and the lofty quality of devotion to an abstract cause.

I will here describe a little of the work they have done for their country. The conscious preparation for the Revolution took about thirty years. A handful of people in Paris, among them Selma Hanum working with her brother Ahmed Riza Bey, and another handful in Turkey, had to arouse the whole slumbering land to a sense of horror of the tyranny under which they were supinely lying, and to a hope in the power of the Young Turk party to save them from that tyranny. In this work of education, women took their part. Several Turkish ladies refused to marry and gave themselves to teaching that so they might enlighten and stimulate such girls as showed promise of intelligence, and win their adherence to the cause. When the Young Turk party was well organized,

women served to carry their dangerous messages and papers from one harem to another, for a Moslem woman is never searched.

In Salonika, for years the headquarters of the Young Turk party, among the most disinterested and useful of these women was Gulistan Hanum. She had been educated at the American College for Girls at Constantinople, and when she married Asim Bey, a fine young man, she taught him English and became his friend and companion. She used to take a Boston journal, and culling articles from it that she thought would interest the Turkish women, translated and published them in Turkish journals in preparation for the revolution. Her work was recognized in Salonika, for when the constitution was proclaimed there, she was the spokeswoman for the Ottoman women of the city in an address to the leaders of the Young Turk party.

Women were used not only to carry messages but also to convert men to the cause. As an instance I will relate the story of a remarkable Turkish woman whom I count among my friends.

Halideh Hanum was educated in the American College for Girls in Constantinople. The government objected again and again to her taking a western education, and occasionally removed her from the college, but her father was so much impressed with her intellectual possibilities that he deliberately sacrificed his own future to keep her in school. She was a conspicuously fine student, especially in philosophy, astronomy and literature, and early showed a taste for writing.

After finishing her college course with distinction, she married and became the mother of two boys. During these years she wrote a good deal, essays and sketches for the most part, but could never publish them, as all original writing was checked by the government. But her literary attempts cultivated her style, while her personal experience disciplined her character, and her studies in Turkish history and literature sharpened both her intellect and her patriotism.

With July 1908 came the opportunity to use these qualities. She was lifted up to the seventh heaven of joy by the revolution, and seizing her pen she wrote a poetical outburst entitled "Address of Othman to the Third Army Corps," in which Othman, the founder of the Ottoman Empire is represented as glorying in the deeds of the Army Corps of Salonika that had accomplished the bloodless revolution. This article, so Oriental in its imagery and spirit that it is hardly translatable, brought her immediate fame. The editors of a newspaper, the *Tanine* or "Echo," destined to play a large



rôle in Ottoman politics, immediately engaged Halideh Hanum as contributing editor, and she wrote for it regularly under the name of Halideh Salih, the latter being her husband's name. She wrote careful, intelligent articles on such subjects as woman's education and curricula for new schools; she wrote burning essays on the griefs of the Cretan Moslems, and later on the cruel massacres of the Armenians near Adana; she wrote historical sketches of women who have swayed Turkish rule and rulers; and the people read all she wrote and called for more. Her old manuscripts were gathered up into volumes and she was asked to contribute to seven papers and magazines.

Halideh Hanum's husband, an able professor of physics in the so-called Turkish University, was put on the Ministry of Education with the avowed idea that he would speak not only for himself but also for his intellectual wife. She was asked to teach a new school, to organize women's clubs, to be honorary member of men's clubs. The soldiery sent her word that they adored her. There was not a busier nor happier woman in the world than Halideh Hanum from July 1908 to April 1909, and few women have been more influential. Throughout all this period she kept moderate, sane, and unselfish, never leaving off her veil, nor behaving other than as becomes a modest Turkish lady.

When the counter-revolution of April 1909 burst upon the astonished city of Constantinople, Halideh Hanum was temporarily carried down by the flood that threatened to drown all progressive and enlightened Ottomans. The office of *Tanine* was wrecked and all the manuscripts were torn to pieces. She was compelled to fly from Stamboul, and with her children took refuge in her old College. There she showed such endurance, such heroism as one seldom sees. Her cry was "my country, oh my country!" with no concern as to her own losses or danger. When the army of liberation marched into the city and freed it from the tyrant, and when Abdul Hamid was deposed forever from the throne he had abused, Halideh Hanum was one of the Young Turks who rejoiced solemnly over the restored liberties of Turkey. She has resumed her writing and will retain her eager, intelligent interest in Ottoman politics, as well as in the larger interests of humanity. Halideh Hanum, with her strong intellectual grasp, her trained pen and her beautiful idealistic character would be an honor to any country that she called hers.

Halideh Salih is not the only woman writer in Turkey. Ferideh Hanum has written for the papers; Niguar Hanum is a recognized

poet; one lady is writing a play with her husband; Meliha Hanum has translated some poems from English into Turkish. Of the literary work of Gulistan Hanum I have already spoken. The wife of Tewfik Fikret Bey, who is considered to be Turkey's foremost living poet, learned all his poems by heart in the old days, for fear that their papers should be seized and destroyed. Fatma Alieh Hanum has written several attractive essays on Moslem life. Several special women's journals were published in the winter of 1908-9, containing some very worthy contributions from women.

Of course the access of freedom that came upon Turkey in 1908 aroused great desire in the hearts of Turkish women for a fuller intellectual life. Clubs started up all over Constantinople, and the ignorance and helplessness of so many of the women combined with their eager desire for culture were pitiful. Women, as I said elsewhere, petitioned to be allowed to study nursing and art. I know one very talented girl, Rabieh Hanum, who without a single lesson in drawing or painting has taught herself to reproduce in black and white such great pictures as she could obtain. She is now hoping to study abroad. In the plans made for women's schools Selma Hanum and Halideh Hanum are constantly consulted and will probably have a large hand in working out details. They feel that there are no Turkish women as yet trained to take the direction and organization of schools for girls and that American or English women will be needed to start them, but I am sure Turkish women can be trained to make good teachers and will be quick to assimilate western methods. In the American College for Girls we find the Turkish girls very docile and eager to learn.

Have I not shown enough to produce a faith in the future of Turkish people that can count among them such inspiring intellects as Halideh Hanum, such disinterested patriots as Gulistan Hanum, such writers as Fatma Alieh Hanum, such pure souls and promising intelligences as are these Turkish women of whom I have written?

In that future day when Turkey shall take her rightful place among the enlightened nations, by the side of the brave, loyal men shall be found intelligent, loving and high-minded Turkish women.